

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUN 20 1978

DATE ENTERED

Approved 12/1/78

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Fort Union, New Mexico

AND/OR COMMON

Fort Union National Monument

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Fort Union National Monument

CITY, TOWN

Watrous

☒

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

New Mexico

CODE

35

COUNTY

Mora

CODE

033

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

☐ DISTRICT

☐ BUILDING(S)

☐ STRUCTURE

☒ SITE

☐ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

☒

PUBLIC

☐ PRIVATE

☐ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

☐ IN PROCESS

☐ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

☐ OCCUPIED

☐ UNOCCUPIED

☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED

☐ NO

**PRESENT USE**

☐ AGRICULTURE

☐ COMMERCIAL

☐ EDUCATIONAL

☐ ENTERTAINMENT

☒ GOVERNMENT

☐ INDUSTRIAL

☐ MILITARY

☐ MUSEUM

☒ PARK

☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☐ RELIGIOUS

☐ SCIENTIFIC

☐ TRANSPORTATION

☐ OTHER:

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

U.S. Government, Department of the Interior, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

Southwest Regional Office, P. O. Box 728

CITY, TOWN

Santa Fe, New Mexico

STATE

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Mora County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Mora

STATE

New Mexico

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Theme XV

"Military and Indian Affairs." p. 111 (1959)

"Fort Union and the Santa Fe Trail." (1959)

DATE

☒

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

National Park Service, Southwest Regional Office

CITY, TOWN

Santa Fe, New Mexico

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☐ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☒ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED  
☐ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located on an open grassy plain and bordered by low mountains to the north and west, the site of Fort Union was selected because of its proximity to the junction of the Mountain and Cimarron branches of the Santa Fe Trail, the availability of abundant wood, grass, and water, and for its distance from Santa Fe -- "that sink of vice and extravagance." Of the three forts, only the ruins of the second and third are extant.

The first fort, constructed of unseasoned logs, quickly decayed and was not maintained. No above ground remains of that initial fort survive. During the summer of 1861, work began on the second of the posts. "Earth parapets formed a square with angles shaped like arrowheads jutting out 200 feet from each corner. In these angles were storehouses, company barracks, and officers' quarters. Other quarters and a magazine occupied the quadrangle. The parapets supported firing platforms and artillery emplacements. Four more earthen angles projected from the sides of the square as curtains against enemy fire. In geometric design the fortification resembled an eight-pointed star, and thus became known as the star fort."1 Abandoned almost as soon as the Confederate advance into New Mexico was arrested, it too was quickly claimed by the elements. Although the interior chambers of the earthen parapets soon collapsed, the mounds remain and the outline of the star is clearly visible.

The third, and most permanent of the three, differed not only in its conception, but also in its construction. Consisting of three separate installations -- the Post itself, a Quartermaster Depot, and an Ordnance Depot -- the buildings of the sprawling new complex stood in sharp contrast to the previous log or earthen structures. "Designed in the boxlike 'territorial' style of architecture that came to be distinctive of New Mexico, they were constructed of native building materials. The walls were of adobe brick, moulded from soil dug from the valley north of the fort. They stood on stone foundations and as protection against moisture were coated with plaster fired in limekilns south of the fort, and surmounted by copings of bricks manufactured in Las Vegas. At first, dressed lumber for the woodwork came from Ceran St. Vrain's sawmill at the town of Mora and from two mills on the Sapello River. Later the Army acquired its own planing mill, and logs cut from the Fort Union timber reserve in the Turkey Mountains were dressed at the fort. Such items as tools, nails, window glass, fire bricks, and roofing tin had to be hauled over the Santa Fe Trail from Fort Leavenworth."2

Despite its substantial nature, Fort Union fell into ruins soon after its abandonment in 1891. A combination of weathering from the elements and removal of doors, windows, and assorted lumber by the local populace caused rapid deterioration. Today, only the rock foundations, partial adobe walls, and a few brick fireplaces remain. While the National Park Service is restrained by legislation from reconstructing any of the structures, all have been treated with chemical preservatives to retard further losses.

### MANAGEMENT EXCLUSIONS:

Within Fort Union National Monument there are several structures which do not meet National Register criteria. These buildings are of more recent construction and bear no relationship to the reasons for which the fort was included in the National Park system. These exclusions include the residence and maintenance area

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1851-1891

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Established by Colonel Edwin V. Sumner in August, 1851, Fort Union soon became the largest U.S. Army installation in the Southwest. Initially created to provide protection for the western portion of the Santa Fe Trail, Fort Union actually consisted of three different forts. The first, constructed of "unseasoned, unhewn, and unbarked pine logs," soon fell into a total state of disrepair and was replaced during the early years of the Civil War by an earthen star-shaped fort. Designed to thwart the impending Confederate invasion of 1862, the new fort was never tested. Troops from Fort Union, did, however, clash with the Southerners in the Battle of Glorieta Pass and succeeded in forcing their eventual withdrawal from the territory. With New Mexico securely in Union hands, work began on the third and most significant of the three forts. Requiring six years to complete, the new establishment included: the Post of Fort Union, the Fort Union Quartermaster Depot, and the Fort Union Ordnance Depot. While the Post was designed primarily to respond to the exigencies of the Santa Fe trade, the two depots served as supply bases for large portions of the Southwest. The Quartermaster Depot, the largest and most elaborately staffed of the three units, provided the supply needs of other army posts in New Mexico, and the Arsenal represented the only installation of its kind between St. Louis and Benicia, California.

Throughout its existence, Fort Union provided constant protection for traffic along the Santa Fe Trail and launched continual offensive operations against hostile Indians. Perhaps the most famous of these involved Christopher "Kit" Carson who led an expedition into the Navajo stronghold of Canyon de Chelly. Victorious where others had failed, Carson forced the final subjugation of the tribe and engineered their removal to a reservation in eastern New Mexico.

With the arrival of the railroad in 1879, the usefulness of the post had come to an end. "The Indians had been conquered:" and "as an artery of commerce the Santa Fe Trail had been replaced."<sup>1</sup> Although it remained in limited operation for another ten years, the fort ceased its active role, and in 1891 it was permanently abandoned.

<sup>1</sup>Robert M. Utley, Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico, National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 57-58.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Soldier and Brave: Indian and Military Affairs in the Trans-Mississippi West, Including a Guide to Historic Sites and Landmarks. Harper & Row, Publishers New York: 1963.

Utley, Robert M. Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico. National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 35, Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1962.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 720.60

UTM REFERENCES

A 13 500075 3974570  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 13 496625 3972365  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B 13 500075 3972365  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D 13 496625 3974570  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET PAGE 1

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dwight Pitcaithley Historian

August 1977

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 728

TELEPHONE

505-988-6445

CITY OR TOWN

Santa Fe, New Mexico

STATE

## 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES ☒

NO ☐

NONE ☐

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ☒ National ☐ State ☐ Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Chief, Div. of Cultural Resource Mgmt.

DATE

6/9/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: Bill Labovick

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

12/1/78

DATE

12/1/78

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Fort Union

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 1

located on the southern boundary of the monument, the visitor center, and a water tank located on the northern boundary. It is recognized that these structures serve a management purpose and occasionally require alterations necessitated by a change in their function. Modifications to these supportive buildings will reflect a compatible architectural style and will not intrude upon the historic resources of the monument.

<sup>1</sup>Robert M. Utley, Fort Union National Monument, New Mexico (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 34-35.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Fort Union ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 2

Parcel 1:

BEGINNING at corner No. 1 (a stake in stone mound), from which the corner common to the northwest corner of Section 6, Township 19 North, Range 19 East, NMPM, and the southwest corner of Section 31, Township 20 North, Range 19 East, NMPM, bears North 67°30' East, a distance of 8707.30 feet; thence South 60°24'30" West, a distance of 5281.04 feet to corner No. 2 (a stake in stone mound); thence North 29°35'30" West, a distance of 1674.66 feet to corner No. 3 (a stake in stone mound); thence North 17°11'30" West, a distance of 844.6 feet to corner No. 4; thence North 47°12'30" West, a distance of 598.70 feet to corner No. 5; thence North 29°35'30" West, a distance of 2209.0 feet to corner No. 6 (a stake in stone mound); thence North 60°24'30" East, a distance of 5279.53 feet to corner No. 7; thence South 29°35'30" East, a distance of 5278.9 feet to corner No. 1, the point of beginning; containing 637 acres more or less; and

Parcel 2: detached

BEGINNING at corner No. 1 (a stake in stone mound), from which corner No. 6, Parcel No. 1, described above, bears North 69°56' East, a distance of 2475.6 feet; thence South 24°51' East, 1926.4 feet to corner No. 2 (a stake in stone mound); thence South 65°09' West, a distance of 1890.3 feet to corner No. 3 (a stake in stone mound); thence North 24°51' West, a distance of 1926.4 feet to corner No. 4 (a stake in stone mound); thence North 65°09' East, a distance of 1890.3 feet to corner No. 1, the point of beginning; containing 83.6 acres more or less.